

STATEMENT
By
Bobby Acord, Administrator
USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service
Regarding Avian Influenza
February 13, 2004

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture is working closely with affected states to address the recent detections of low pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI). Low pathogenic avian influenza is not known to be harmful to human health or to affect the safety of poultry meat.

“The AI strain in affected states is not the same strain of the virus that is affecting birds and some people in Asia. The Asia strain is highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI), and the United States has not had an incidence of HPAI for 20 years.

“Low Pathogenic Avian Influenza viruses are endemic in wild waterfowl and migrating bird populations worldwide. Consequently, each year we occasionally find some occurrences of low pathogenic avian influenza in domestic poultry, particularly where birds are raised outdoors. Such occurrences can largely be prevented from occurring in poultry through good management practices.

“The public attention surrounding these cases is elevated this year because of worldwide attention regarding the Asia situation. There is a federal/state protocol for controlling the occasional low pathogenic avian influenza outbreaks in the United States and this year is no different. USDA’s Animal Plant & Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and its state partners are actively communicating with producers about how to prevent the spread of avian influenza.

“APHIS specialists are advising the states affected on issues of surveillance, depopulation, testing, disposal and cleaning and disinfection. In addition, USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratory, which routinely conducts confirmatory testing for avian influenza and many other animal diseases, is providing testing services to the states, as requested.

“In addition, the federal government is working to prevent the Asian AI strain from entering the country. On Feb. 4, USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services banned the importation of birds from eight Southeast Asian countries. These imports were already under tight restrictions because of the presence of exotic Newcastle disease in these countries. The federal government is also participating in a worldwide effort being led by the World Health Organization to help control the spread of the disease.

“The federal government is also working to assure our trading partners of the safety of U.S. poultry.”

Information about AI can be found at www.aphis.usda.gov/.

